

The Swift



Looking out for birds

During the summer, one bird which I get an enormous thrill out of seeing is the Swift. Swifts may be identified by their dark brown colouring and sickle-shaped wings. Parties of these birds are usually heard screaming while flying at a low height around the rooftops of houses. This indicates that they are nesting in the vicinity. The speed and aerial dynamics of this bird are truly amazing.

The Swift is often confused with the Swallow and House Martin and although there are similarities in their appearance, they are not related. It is a unique bird and does everything on the wing. – eating, drinking by catching raindrops, sleeping and mating. It settles only at its nest site which is usually high up in a wall crevice or under a convex roof tile. They never settle voluntarily on the ground as their short legs and long wings make it difficult for them to become airborne again. Sadly, the Swift is declining in numbers, due mainly to demolition of their nesting sites and the modern methods used in renovating old buildings. Since 1995, the number of Swifts has reduced by about a third. The good news however, is that buildings can be renovated with Swifts in mind but a sympathetic attitude is needed from house owners, local authorities, developers and builders.

Some fascinating facts about Swifts:-

- Unlike Swallows and Martins, they are only with us between May and August.
- A young Swift will spend its first two to three years in flight, and will not land until it nests.
- If stormy weather is forecast, they will fly away and return many hours and sometimes days later. Chicks at the nest become torpid and will survive for several days without being fed.
- They travel 14,000 miles every year.
- At night, they fly to about 10,000 feet. They can navigate through different wind speeds while sleeping.

When you are walking around your village or town, listen out for their high pitched screams; look up and you will see them flying around. If you are fortunate to have Swifts nesting in your property, please consider these birds if you have to carry out any renovation work. For information about practical help for Swifts visit www.swift-conservation.org.uk



Jean Parrott

Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire.

If you would like to help the BTO by recording birds and other wildlife which visit your garden, please contact Jean at jpbirds@talktalk.net

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